

Once a Shomer, always a Shomer



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Hungarian/English

I've always felt my Jewish identity was shaped from birth, immersed in the Hungarian Jewish atmosphere that has influenced my values. After studying in Manchester and London, I embraced both English and Hungarian Jewish life. Inspired by Sarvas camp and Hashomer Hatzair, I hope to return home to strengthen Hungary's Jewish community.

While many people can recall a precise point or defining experience that profoundly defined or shaped their Jewishness, there was no such moment in my life. I believe that from the moment of my birth, with my first breath of air, I was immersed in the Hungarian Jewish/Hungarian atmosphere that has shaped my way of thinking and my system of values to this day.

If I am honest, I cannot say that I always fully understand the distinction I have just used - Jewish Hungarian or Hungarian Jew. Nevertheless - and then again, this may be due to my Jewishness - I do (also) have an opinion on this, of course. If I had to choose, I am a Hungarian Jew. At least I would like to be.

In fact, I have lived in England for five full years. I first studied philosophy and theology at the University of Manchester. While I feel more comfortable in the latter field, the former has sometimes frightened me so much that I don't always mention that I studied philosophy. After saying goodbye to Manchester, I moved to London and continued my studies (online) at ORZSE (National Rabbinical School - Jewish University). Here I did a degree in Jewish Cultural History, which I really enjoyed. I found both university environments - English and Hungarian - very congenial and inspiring. Between you and me, neither course is renowned for having too many students, but that's why there are even more opportunities to have valuable conversations with the lecturers.

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Like in Manchester, I live an active Jewish life in London, working in the community. I am responsible for organising and coordinating informal education programmes in a Jewish school. Prior to my current job, I worked in a similar role for another well-known Jewish organisation, also in London. I feel that over the last two years I have gained a very good understanding of how Jewish life in London - and a little bit in England - works and I can compare it with my experience in Hungary. From all of this, and going back to the beginning of my story, I can say that being a Hungarian Jew is one of the most special feelings, and for me perhaps the most important.

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My family had an active religious and communal life both before the war, during socialism and after. I am very grateful that my two brothers and I were brought up in the same spirit. In my experience, there are not many neolog families who have actively cultivated their traditions without major interruptions. This constant connection inspires me personally to help ensure that this chain is not broken. I find it very romantic - and this is perhaps what I miss most about London - to walk the streets and sit in the synagogue pews where my ancestors sat. In Budapest and all over the country, there are so many opportunities to live an active community life. For me, the camp in Sarvas and the Hashomer Hatzair youth organization showed me first and foremost what a fantastic experience it is to "Jew together". Summers spent in the hornet's nest are among the best memories of my life. In fact, I came to Hashomer because of Szarvas. If I remember correctly, the Shomer madrichim - some of whom were also active in Szarvas - enticed the children by saying that Hashomer was actually like this camp, only you could go every Friday. That was the beginning of my activism, which still continues to this day. I write that I am still a shomer because there is a saying that Paam shomer tamid shomer - Once a somer, always a somer. The values, thoughts, connections and friendships I have made during my Friday nights, camps and trips abroad will stay with me for a lifetime.

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Although most of the Jewish families in London have emigrated from Europe generations ago, once they find out that I am Hungarian, they naturally continue to mention with fondness the country in which their grandmother or great-grandmother was born. These are the moments when - and I don't want to offend anyone - I feel even more that my Hungarian Jewishness is a little bit more special - for me.

My plan for the long-term future is to live at home again one day. I want to use my experiences abroad and continue to build our community. After all, being a Hungarian Jew is wonderful, and if not now, when?

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